



Washing Your Car?

How to Keep Local Waters Clean



Get your car clean and keep Edmonds green at the same time!



For many of us, washing our car or truck is as American as baseball and apple pie. It's hard to imagine that there is a connection between keeping your car clean and keeping our streams, lakes, and marine waters clean and healthy. It's harder still to believe that one person washing their car can really cause any harm. However, thousands of people washing their cars can be a serious problem.

Where Does the Soapy Water and Rinse Water Go?

Car washwater and rinse water contains a mixture of detergents, and oils, heavy metals and other pollutants that we wash off of our vehicles. If this wash water flows along the street, it can enter a storm drain, and then flow to Edmonds' streams and lakes or directly into Puget Sound. This soapy, polluted water is untreated and can kill aquatic plants and animals.



What is a Storm Drain?

A storm drain, pictured below, is the entrance to a system of underground pipes that collects and carries water from streets and parking lots, and discharges it untreated into Puget Sound, and our lakes, streams and wetlands.



Is Car Washing Illegal?

No! Washing your vehicle is not illegal.

But discharge of anything but clean stormwater runoff into the storm drain is technically illegal, per Edmonds Community Development Code Chapter 7.200.

Per Department of Ecology recommendation, the City has adopted an educational rather than enforcement approach to car washing. If you want to learn more, contact information can be found at the end of this educational brochure. For more information from the Department of Ecology, go to www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/stormwater/CarWash.html or www.ecy.wa.gov/washington_waters/carwash.html.

A Note on Soaps

All soaps, including biodegradable ones, can harm our waterways. Soaps break the surface tension of water, lowering the oxygen level which is harmful to fish and other aquatic life. The worst soaps contain phosphates. This nutrient causes unwanted algae blooms in surface waters. And don't forget — car washwater is a mixture of soap, oil, grease, and heavy metals.



What Should I Do To Keep Our Water Clean?

- When washing your car at home, wash it on the lawn (or other vegetated area) to keep the water out of the storm drain. Mild, soapy water won't hurt your lawn; it will actually water it!
- Wash your car on an area that drains to your lawn or a vegetated area.
- Use waterless car wash products, available at auto parts stores, supermarkets, and online.
- Take your car to a commercial car wash facility that discharges its water to the sewer system, where it is treated or recycles it.
- Find a community car wash that uses a car wash kit and disposes of the wash water to the sewer system.



Water Conservation

Car wash water usage:

Type of Wash	Gallons per car
Self-service	8-18
Conveyor wash	14-60
In-bay automatic	10-50
Home car washing	16-180



Other Ways to Wash Your Car and Keep Edmonds Clean and Green.

- Use a shut-off nozzle on your hose to conserve water.
- Choose a soap that has little or no phosphates, is biodegradable, and contains no chlorine, bleach, nitrates, or ammonia. Avoid labels with "Caution," "Danger," or "Warning." The soapy water will be kinder to your lawn or other vegetated area.
- Use a small amount of soap! You don't need 4" of suds.
- If you live in a condominium complex, ask your Homeowners Association to purchase a SudSafe Car Wash Kit for use at your complex. This kit can allow you to wash your vehicle in your parking lot and **not** discharge the wash water to the storm drains. Contact the Engineering Division (see below) for details.



Clean & Green Car Wash Program

For More Information:

Contact the City of Edmonds Engineering Division at (425) 771-0220 x1322 or michael.cawrse@edmondswa.gov

